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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an improvisational dance model that analyzes verbs and adverbs in terms of their movement essence and yields a unique group dance using dancers of any age or experience. Essence dance uses word cards to build a dance. Each word (verb or adverb) suggests a movement or use of the body. The teacher begins by charting a piece of music, outlining the main sections and the number of beats in each section. Students then randomly select two cards, a verb and an adverb, to write into the chart for each session. For each verb and adverb chosen, students analyze the movement essence in terms of several basics--body, space, time and relationship--by applying the movement variables (related to space, body, time, and relationship). Students improvise together the selected movement variables within the given number of beats. Eventually, they put the sections together and dance the entire piece. They videotape their dance, view the tape, and critique the dance. The word lists include such verbs as pound, crawl, drag, tap, frown, ooze, strut, gallop, and stagger and such adverbs as powerfully , softly, up, tiny, fast, briskly, jerky, slowly, and evenly. (SM)

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ESSENCE DANCE: A SIMPLE MODEL FOR IMPROVISATION

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A Brief Description:

Many dance teachers and physical educators are uncomfortable guiding movement improvisation. This presentation explains and explores a practical improvisational dance model that analyzes verbs and adverbs in terms of their movement *essence* and yields a one-of-a-kind group dance using dancers of any age or experience.

The "Essence Dance" process:

"Essence" dance uses word cards to build a dance. Each word (a verb or adverb), listed below, suggests a movement or use of the body. The teacher begins the process by charting a piece of music: outlining the main sections and the number of beats in each section. Students then randomly select two cards, a verb and an adverb, to write into the chart for each section. For each verb and adverb chosen, students analyze the *movement essence* in terms of these basics: body, space, time, and relationship, by applying the movement variables list below. Students improvise together the selected movement variables within the given number of beats. Eventually, when students have analyzed, improvised, and crafted all sections, they put the sections together and dance the entire piece. They videotape their dance, view the tape, and critique the dance asking questions such as: What worked well? What was less effective? What would you change? What would you expand?. . .

I. Session Outline:

I. **Introduction**:
- A. Description of ***Essence Dance*** within the context of a required Calvin College PER course *Creative Dance*
- B. Display and explanation of ***Essence Dance*** chart
- C. Display and explanation of ***Movement Variables*** poster

II. **Workshop:**
- A. Randomly choose, chart, and discuss "movement essence" of each selected word (verb and adverb)
- B. Through improvisation, students craft each section and practice together
- C. Students perform entire dance while being videotaped.

III. **Conclusion:**
- A. Watching and critiquing the dance on video.
- B. Questions and Answers

2. Movement Variables

BODY

Body parts, body lead (Which body parts are involved in the movement? Which body part "leads" or initiates the movement?)

Muscles: contraction and release (Is there muscle tension? Where? Which muscles are relaxed?)

Weight: heavy / light (Is the movement weighted heavy or light?)

Flow: fluid / percussive (Does one movement flow to the next in a connected sustained flow or does the movement erupt with a burst of energy that then dissipates?)

Balance: in balance / off balance, fall / recovery (Is the position a static balance? Does the movement pass from in-balance to off-balance or from fall to recovery?)

Motion / Stillness (Does the composition use both motion and stillness for variety and punctuation?)

Locomotor / Non-locomotor [Does the movement travel from one place to another (locomotor) or within the same space (non-locomotor)?]

Energy / Intensity (Is the movement charged with great energy or does it have a very light touch with low intensity?)

SPACE

Personal / general / shared [Is the movement individual; each person remaining within his/her own space (personal)? Are all dancers moving through the entire space, each with his/her own individual pattern (general)? Are two or more dancers moving together in shared movements, usually touching each other (shared)?]

Size: big / small (Is the movement large - using a great deal of space, or small - narrow and delicate, close to the dancer?)

Dimension:

planes: front wall / side wall / table top (Does the movement occur in two dimensions - a plane? If yes, what is the angle or placement of the plane?)

height / width / depth (Does the movement occur in three dimensions? If yes, what is the range of its height, width, or depth?)

Direction (Does the movement extend or travel in a line? If yes, in what direction does it move?)

Direct/ indirect path (Does the movement travel in a direct line or meander and/or zigzag in an indirect path?)

Level: high / medium / low (How close to the floor or above the floor does the [illegible]ment occur?)

Shape: body / space / floor (Does the body define a particular shape? Does a moving body part carve a shape in space as it moves? Does the path the dancer travels define a shape on the floor?)

Positive and negative space [Does the dancer's body create shapes or forms (positive space) and open spaces between body parts (negative space)?]

Symmetry / asymmetry (Does the dancer or do the dancers define a symmetrical shape or relationship or is the design asymmetrical?)

Focus (In what direction does the mover look? Do the eyes and other body parts focus in different directions? Is the focus limited or infinite?)

TIME

Beat: regular / irregular, metric / non-metric (Is there a regular pulse that underlies the movement or is the rhythm less defined and irregular?)

Tempo: fast / slow (Is the movement fast or slow? Does it change tempo?)

Measure: accented / unaccented, beats in a group (Are movement phrases defined by consistent numbers of beats or do the phrase lengths vary? Which movements are more important and therefore stressed or accented?)

RELATIONSHIP

Individual / partner / group (Are dancers moving alone, in pairs, or in groups?)

Objects, props, architecture (How does the proximity of dancers to objects in their space affect or define the movement?)

3. Word lists

Verbs (some suggestions)

Pound	ooze	strut	gallop	pat
Crawl	bend/stretch	explode	wilt	hand
Rise	slide	swoop	weave	stagger
Stamp	turn	whirl	tremble	sweep
Drag	prance	wring	shatter	sway
Tap	wave	hobble	collapse	push/pull
Frown	close/open	roll	lean	rock
Slither	hop	bounce	wiggle	soar
Curl/uncurl	drift	stride	sail	grow/shrink
Jump	reach	tiptoe	swing	run
Lunge	march	glide	stroke	rotate
Point	strike	shuffle	dodge	stroll
Dive	kick	fling	skip	freeze/melt
expand	leap	sink	fall	contract

Adverbs (some suggestions)

Powerfully	explosively	in slow motion
Forward	tiny	in curved lines
Medium fast	leisurely	big
Unevenly	like lightening	upside down
Softly	indirectly	heavily
Sideward	narrow	crouching
Brightly	flickering	slowly
Gigantic	gently	evenly
Like the wind	diagonally	suddenly
Gliding	in a circle	floating
Lightly	fast	middle sized
Standing	percussive	fluid
High	shimmering	strongly
Low	small	jerky
Middle level	briskly	gradually getting bigger
Short	in straight lines	gradually getting smaller
Towering	shaking	suddenly getting smaller
In a spiral	sustained	suddenly getting bigger
Up	backward	gradually slowing down
In a square	staccato	gradually getting faster
In a zigzag	down	shattering
Suspended	smoothly	shrinking
Lying	sitting	wide
Flashing	melting	in a serpentine line
Swinging	sharply	vibrating